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# Challenges and Opportunities for Peace (or Conflict) in Higher Education

## The Case of Afghanistan and Somaliland

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# Introduction

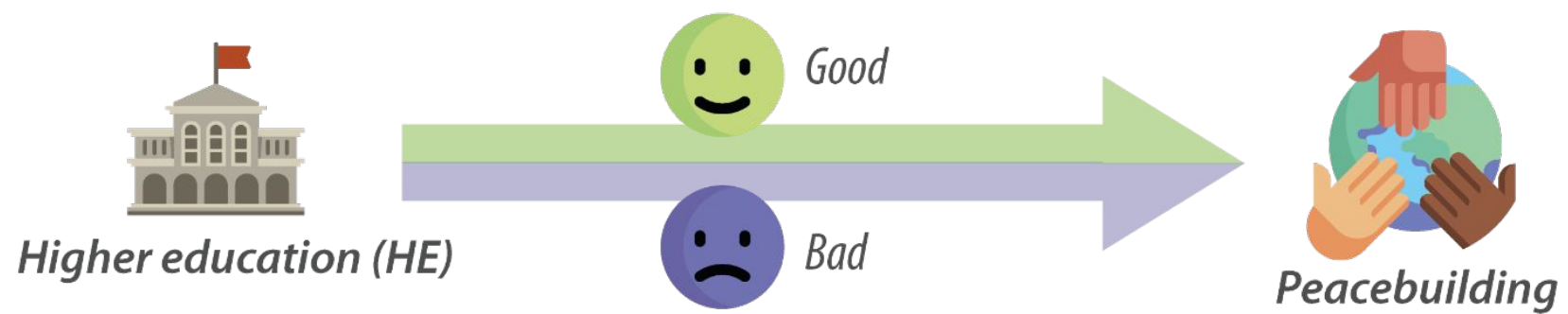
- A major aspect of the 2030 SDGs is the conceptualisation of higher education as a tool for peacebuilding.
- This paper critically examines the challenges and opportunities for higher education to contribute to peacebuilding in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts.
- Data was collected through interviews, document analysis, and digital artefacts with university educators in Afghanistan and Somaliland

# Driving RQs



1. How do university educators pay careful attention to the local contexts (e.g., Afghanistan and Somaliland) in unique and particular ways?
2. How does this affect their choice of pedagogy?
3. Are the pedagogies across Somaliland and Afghanistan the same, or relatively similar?
4. What are the implications for pedagogy in conflict-affected contexts?

# Literature Review



## Spread of messages

- Group attitudes and beliefs can be driven to engagement in peacebuilding and societal change activities by peace education (e.g., Cromwell 2019; Harris and Lewer 2008; Ross 2017)
- HE often injects a political or religious ideology - violence to students (Lebeau, 2008)
- HE unintentionally reproduces cultural and structural violence (Kevin, 2020)

## Horizontal inequality

- Social mobility (Kaunert and Sahar 2021)
- HE mitigates some issues like discrimination or economic justice (Kaunert and Sahar 2021)
- Group inequities measured by different acceptance rates (Milton and Barakat 2016)
- HE widen disparities, intensify and fixate the status of privileges (Sahar and Kaunert 2021)

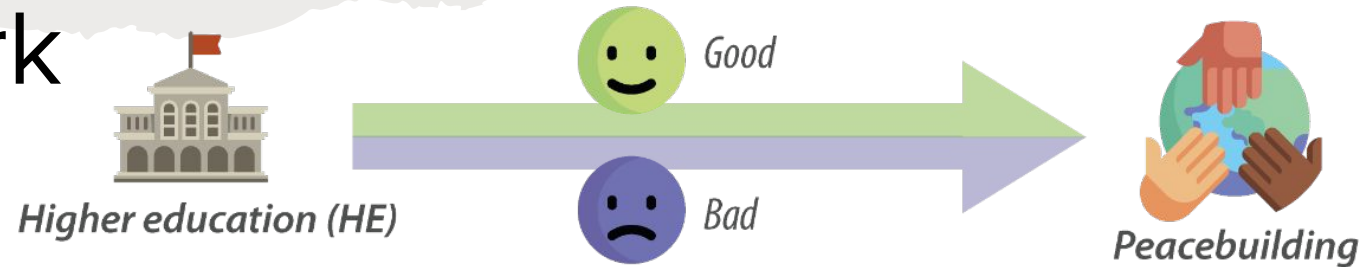
## Identity politics

- Contact hypothesis (Allort et al. 1954) : HE allows students to be exposed to other groups (Niens 2009; Sagy 2002; Tomovska 2010) → Identity bases of conflict can be mitigated
- 'Negative socialisation effects' (Milton and Barakat 2016)
- Intergroup contact can also amplify negative attitudes towards others (Kanas et al. 2017)

# Conceptual framework

## 'Two faces of education'

(Bush and Saltarelli 2000)



## 'Third face'

(Metro 2020)

'... Neither the bad sort that perpetuates war nor the good sort that delivers social transformation, but the sort that may be more common in conflict and post-conflict situation: well-intended if theoretically muddled; passably executed; somewhat problematic; and having mixed effects on society.' (294)

**Negative  
peace**

*De-emphasising war*

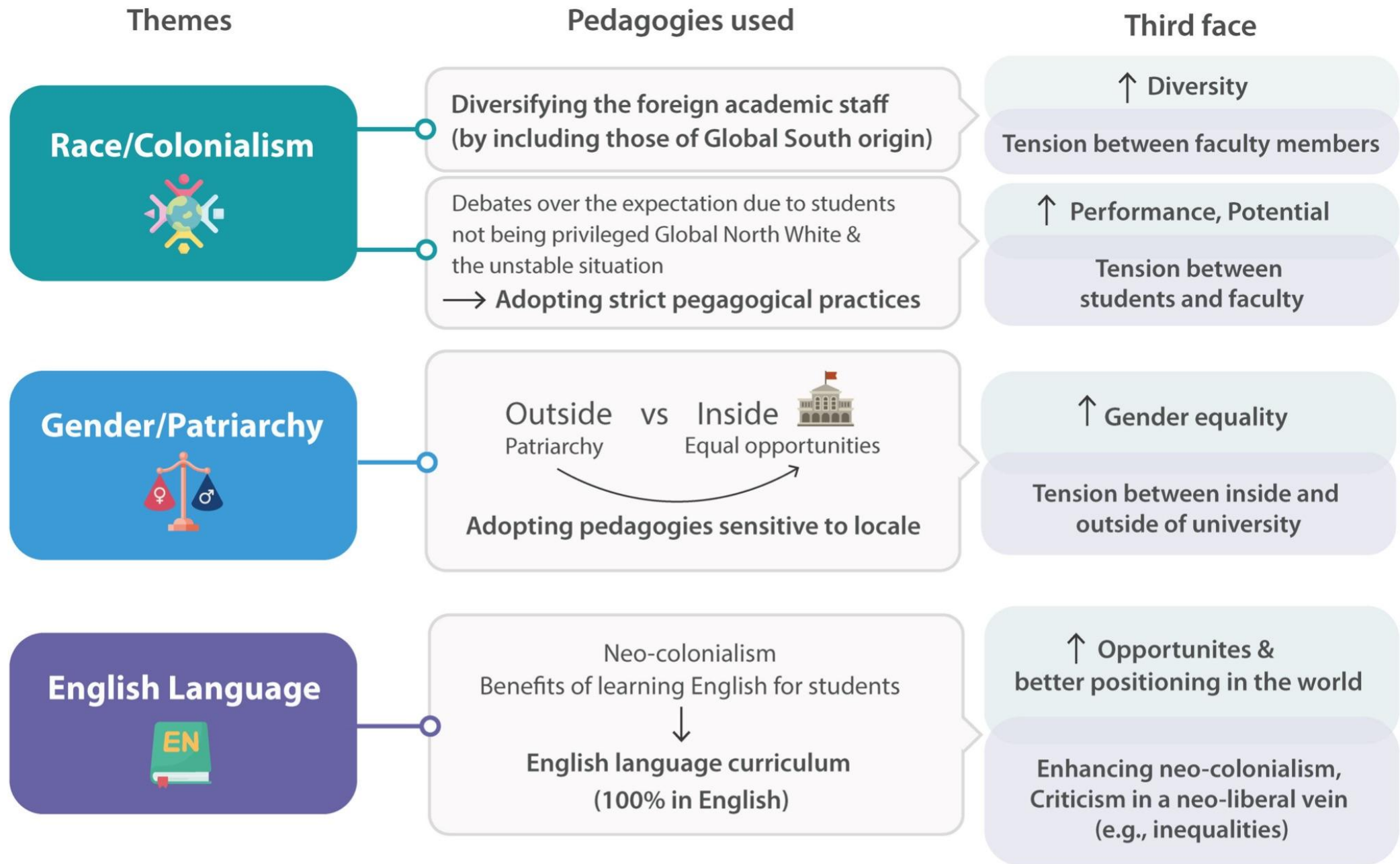
**Positive  
peace**

*Promoting peace*

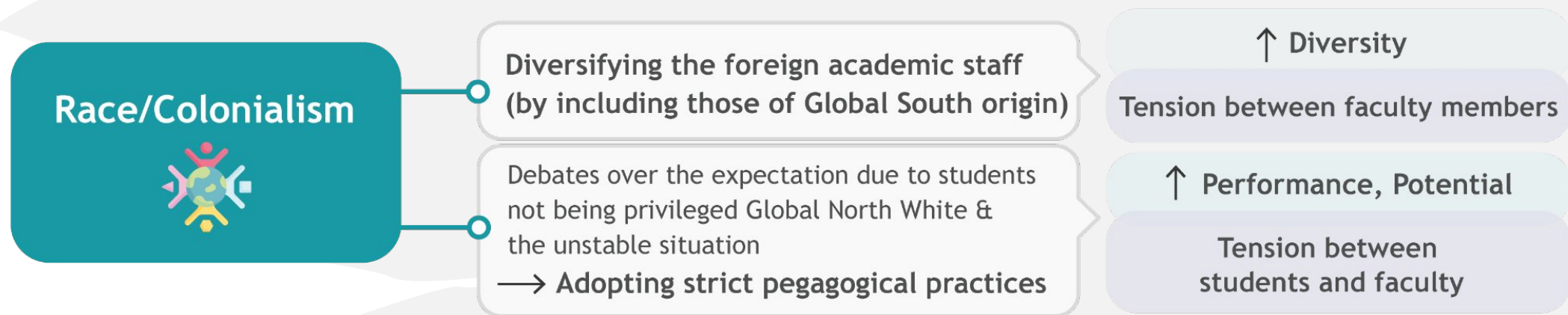
# Methods

- Qualitative comparative case study (Yin, 2003)
  - Interviews with 12 faculty in two universities
  - 6 in Afghan Case University A + 6 in Somali Case University B
  - Document analysis
  - Digital artefacts
- Inductive and constant comparative analysis of data (Cresswell & Poth, 2017)

# Findings








- *'Liberal white saviour' and 'poor little Afghans' (P1)*
- *'Hero saviour narrative [...] trying to work on others to make ourselves feel good' (P12)*
- *'We've got a really strict faculty-student handbook that says, "If your hand got blown off that doesn't mean that you can't finish your essay."' (P1)*



## Gender/Patriarchy

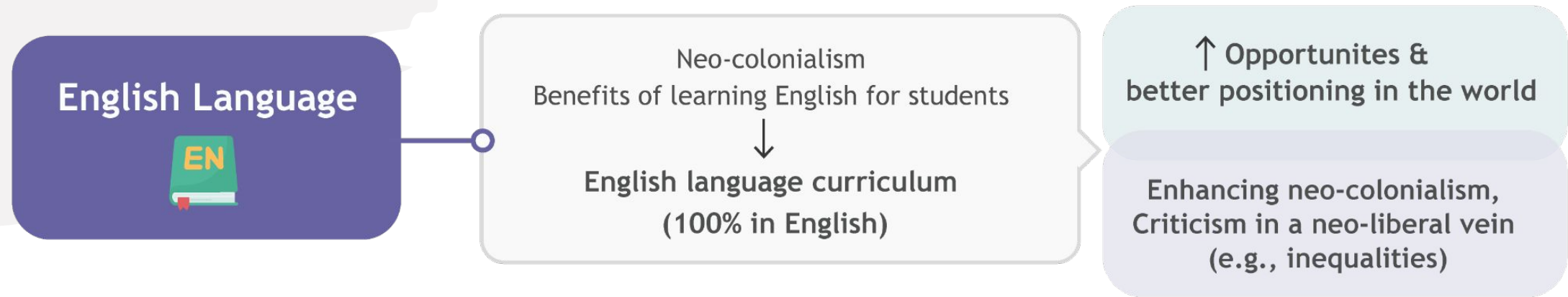


Outside vs Inside   
Patriarchy vs Equal opportunities  
Adopting pedagogies sensitive to locale

↑ Gender equality

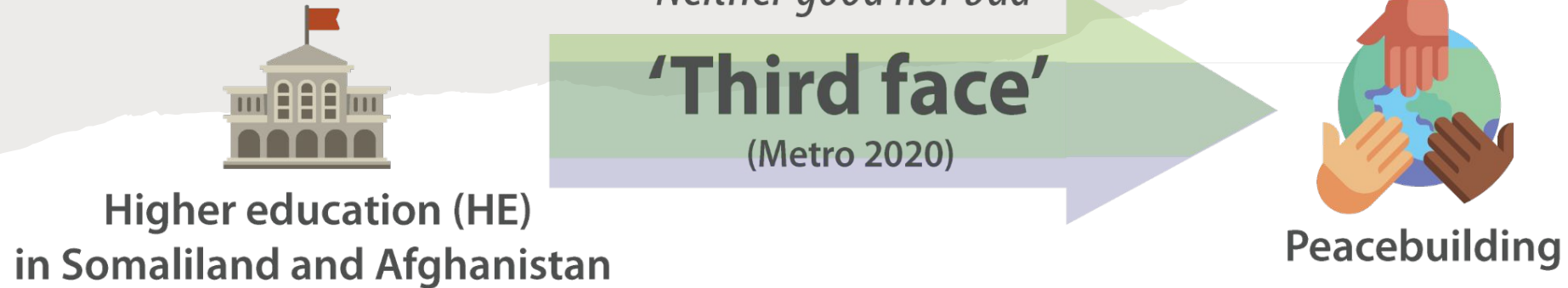
Tension between inside and outside of university

- *[Girls] have a degree, but they just don't have the pull. So they are married off. And it's like, "I was raped last night by my husband."* (P5)
- *'A lot of the other things that they have shared is that "No, this is the only place for me." This is the place, especially for girls. "This is the only place that I can study." And I can see why. I mean, it's safe and insulated'* (P2)
- *'You can't go too far in discussions in the classroom, you have to be mindful of, well, in an extremely conservative Islamic country that mixing singles, men and women is really frowned upon on the outside or forbidden and that, you know, certain subject matter you can skirt around it'* (P4)



- *'The system we're tied into - that the neoliberal system of globalisation and business and that. And if he's speaking a certain type of English at a certain level, you have more advantages than those who don't'* (P6)
- *'So, my gut instinct would say I feel like there's a lot of issues with the fact that we do a lot of these classes in English. Who gets to be in those classes because we select in English? Who gets to teach these classes because it's in English? What kind of theories and terms get propagated and reproduced because it is through English?'* (P12)

# Discussion



- The findings demonstrate that the faces of higher education in Afghanistan and Somaliland are not necessarily 'good' or 'bad' as Bush and Saltarelli theorised.
- For example, in Case University A, which is neither American nor Afghan, academic staff find themselves complicit in reproducing (and sometimes challenging) liberal peace norms, neo-colonial relations, and neoliberal tendencies in the justification of English-mediated instruction.
- The possibilities for non-violence and sustainable peace through education exists.

# Conclusion

- In summary, the paper examined the diverse pedagogical practices of university educators in two institutions in Afghanistan and Somaliland to explore challenges and opportunities of peacebuilding through higher education.
- This study offers future implications for pedagogy, curriculum, and theory.
- We conclude this paper with the hope that regular, consistent, and sometimes mundane steps can work towards reconciliation and sustainable peacebuilding.

# THANK YOU

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